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The Honorable Frank Wolf
241 Cannon House Office Building
Washington DC 20515-52136

Dear Representative Wolf,

I am responding to your letter of September 16 requesting my personal views on the consequences should our mission in Afghanistan fail. I believe the answer must examine both the likely results in Afghanistan and Central Asia on the one hand, as well as the risks to direct American security through terrorism on the other.

Should we withdraw our forces before the Afghan army is ready to assume the internal defense of Afghanistan—an issue of force quality and support services, not just numbers—I believe there is every reason to assume a civil war will occur in Afghanistan. The Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and even some of the Pushtun population, having experienced Taliban rule once will not submit again. However, lacking an adequate army with which to resist they will fall back on armed militias as they have in the past. This will have several consequences.

Such militia bodies inevitably empower warlords who seek power on their own. They will, at times, collude against each other. Similar infighting led to the initial acceptance of the Taliban by many Afghans in their desperate search for peace at any price.

The civil war will draw in outside powers to further or defend their own interests. At a minimum, the Russians will support forces in order to build a buffer between Afghanistan and the Central Asian states that Russia sees as its zone of influence. Iran will reenter the fray, as it did before, to protect Shia co-religionists and to extend its power. Pakistan will be a major player, quite possibly reverting to the effort to back a Taliban victory as Pakistan did in the past. The Indians will be drawn in to counter the Pakistanis since India fears the growth of terrorist movements that have found sanctuary in Afghanistan in the past. The involvement of both India and Pakistan in a contest that each views as a zero sum game presents additional dangers of conflict between the two nuclear armed states (although I would put this risk as low).

It has been argued that the Taliban and al-Qaida have different goals and, therefore, that a return of the Taliban to Afghanistan would not bring back al-Qaida. The first is true but immaterial. The second conclusion is false. The

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tactical alliance between the two movements is strong and has been intensified during the insurgency. This is particularly true of the areas of Haqqani's influence where we see a steady growth in the presence of foreign fighters as I learned in my visit to Afghanistan in May of this year. In the context of the likely civil war the Taliban will have every incentive to maintain their alliance with al-Qaida since the latter bring with them resources, recruits and fanaticism. Indeed, before our entry into Afghanistan, al-Qaida often constituted the *shock troops* of the Taliban. There is every reason to believe they will return to this role in their alliance.

It is important to consider the likely consequences within Pakistan of a US defeat and a civil war involving the Taliban. It is not simply that Pakistan has a previous stake in a Taliban victory. The Pakistani army has shown itself deeply fearful of Indian influence with the largely Tajik Northern Alliance. The combination of fear and history is very likely to lead the Pakistanis to support the Taliban, notwithstanding whatever pressures we might bring to bear against this. Under these circumstances it is entirely possible that Pakistan will slow down or back off from its active military campaign against extremists within Pakistan. This was the pattern of the past. Pakistan tried repeatedly to put together short term alliances with domestic extremists to keep peace inside Pakistan while concurrently supporting or tolerating their activities in Afghanistan. The history of these alliances is that each one failed, extremism spread out of the tribal areas and into the Punjab and the major Pakistani cities where it now threatens the Pakistani state. This scenario is not guaranteed but it is certainly possible and, indeed, it is difficult to see how Pakistan could refuse to support the Taliban in Afghanistan or do so without compromising with the Taliban's backers in Pakistan. Of course, such actions would render the current US-Pakistani relationship difficult to sustain.

Renewed insurgencies in Central Asia are also possible. In the period of Taliban rule extreme Islamist movements gained support in Afghanistan for insurgencies in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan still exists. Within the last week, Tajik insurgents have mounted an attack that appears to have come from an unsecured area in Afghanistan. Instability in Central Asia will have unpredictable consequences for everything from political reform to gas pipelines.

In short, the future of civil war in Afghanistan, involvement of outside powers, increased extremism in Pakistan, and unrest in Central Asia could continue for years. The civil war in Lebanon involved fewer outside players, a smaller country and population, and less difficult terrain—and it lasted 15 years. The consequences in Afghanistan could easily challenge that record.

A second set of challenges involves our direct struggle with Islamist extremist terrorism directed against US and American interests. The goal of these self proclaimed jihadist movements is the reshaping of the Islamic world. Everywhere they look they think they see us in their way; our military presence in the region, support of Israel, ties with moderate Arab and Muslim governments, and even our very culture are seen by them as a threat. So their war with us will go on even if we retreat from Afghanistan.

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The difference will be that the extremists will have gained their largest propaganda victory since the fall of the Soviet Union. They will trumpet the defeat of the second superpower to fall to their arms. They will use this to rally support and adherents and to discredit those Muslims who oppose them in the name of religion, moderation and modernity.

One cannot predict the results with specificity. Nevertheless, I think it would be extremely naïve to believe that we can unilaterally cease fighting those who are waging a continuing, violent war of terrorism against us and not pay a heightened price in attacks against us in the future. It is important to remember that on jihadist web sites the incident we refer to as the terrorist attack of 9/11 is referred to as "the raid on New York," a chilling reminder of how they see that incident as part of a continuing war.

In sum, sir, should we be defeated in Afghanistan I foresee a substantial period of civil war, regional instability and enhanced risk to American lives and interests. All the dominoes did not fall in Vietnam, a war I fought as a soldier. It is possible that not all the disasters I foresee in Afghanistan will come to pass. Yet even a portion of them would be a considerable calamity for the region and our interests. That is why I believe we must persevere in Afghanistan. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to express my views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Neumann', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ronald E. Neumann
Former US Ambassador to Afghanistan